

VZCZCXRO9716

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FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8278

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS CHISINAU 000629

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB, DRL/AE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Possible Alliance Government Signals Desire to Lift
Romanian Visa Regime

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REF: Chisinau 627

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The four-party non-Communist coalition, which likely will form Moldova's next Government, has stated its intent to reverse a foreign-policy blunder made in April, when the present Government imposed a visa regime on Romanian citizens. Removing these sharply criticized visa requirements would significantly improve Moldova's relations with both Romania and the European Union. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During an August 8 press conference announcing formation of the four-party Alliance for European Integration, the non-Communist parties promised that (if, as is now widely expected, the Party of Communists cedes eight MPs and allows the election of a president) their coalition's first foreign-policy act would be to lift the visa regime against Romania (Reftel). PLDM leader Vlad Filat said that the issue would be considered at one of the first Parliamentary sittings. (Note: The coalition leaders said that another measure which they would take soon after coming to power would be the signing of an Agreement on Local Traffic through the Romanian border. End note.)

Singling out Romania

¶3. (SBU) The visa regime had been introduced as an unfortunate consequence of the April events. Within days after April 5 elections and mob violence on the night of April 7-8, the Government of Moldova (GOM) accused Romania of attempting a coup; accused then Romanian Ambassador Filip Teodorescu of involvement in organizing the protests; declared Teodorescu persona non grata; and imposed a visa requirement on Romanian citizens Q the only EU citizens facing such an imposition.

¶4. (SBU) These moves, and particular the visa requirement, were met with a strong reaction from the EU. On April 23, EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner declared the visa regime "regrettable and unacceptable," and on May 5, the European Parliament condemned Moldova's "unfounded accusations" against Romania and "deplored" the visa regime. In June, EU foreign ministers offered talks on Association Status, but only "as soon as circumstances permit," which many understood as a reference to the visa regime. Such comments from EU officials have provoked concerns in Moldova that the EU might withhold its budgetary support for the country -- the European Neighborhood Partnership Initiative is providing 209.7 million Euros from 2007 to 2010, or even suspend its membership in the Eastern Partnership.

Comment

15. (SBU) Lifting the visa regime would be a very positive first foreign policy step for the new Government. First, it would immediately improve Moldova's bilateral relationship with Romania, which in turn could enhance Romania's willingness to sign the long-pending Border Treaty and Political Treaty. Second, it would set the stage for enhanced relations with the European Union by providing an opening for the EU to move forward with renewed Association Status talks; in addition, it would likely loosen EU assistance purse strings for Moldova.

CHAUDHRY